

**In the Claims:**

1. (previously presented): An apparatus comprising:

a towing vessel having a bow, a stern, opposing starboard and port gunwales and an operator's station of the towing vessel located between the gunwales and positioned at least one of amidships and forward thereof;

a skeletal towing frame attached to the vessel for supporting an elevated tow rope attachment point substantially above the vessel, wherein a first, generally vertical support attached to the starboard gunwale, a second, generally vertical support attached to the port gunwale, and wherein the first and second supports have sufficient length so that vertical extremities thereof extend substantially above the vessel, a third support attached to the vessel forward of the first and second supports, with the third support extending upwardly and aft, and wherein the third support is spaced from the first and second supports a sufficient distance to impart stability to the skeletal towing structure, and wherein upper portions of the first, second and third supports are coupled with a generally horizontal bridging portion located generally above and proximate the operator's station to at least amidships and forward thereof, the towing frame having a structural strength to withstand a force from towing a human performer behind the vessel by a rope attached to the frame; and

an elevated tow rope attachment point attached to the bridging portion for attaching a tow rope thereto for towing the performer.

2. (original): The apparatus recited in claim 1, wherein each of the first and second supports are rotatably attached to the respective starboard and port gunwales of the vessel so that at least a portion of each of the first and second supports is rotatable into a horizontal storage position.

3. (original): The apparatus recited in claim 1, wherein the bridging portion includes at least one generally horizontal member extending laterally across and spaced above the vessel.

4. (original): The apparatus recited in claim 3, wherein the tow rope attachment point is generally positioned above the operator's station.

5. (original): The apparatus recited in claim 1, wherein the first, second and third supports are rigid members.

6. (currently amended): An apparatus comprising:

a towing vessel having a bow, a stern, opposing starboard and port gunwales and an operator station of the towing vessel located between the gunwales and positioned at least one of amidships and forward thereof;

a support having opposing base portions attached to port and starboard portions of the vessel, the support having a central portion between the opposing base portions positioned generally above and proximate the operators station for supporting a tow rope attachment point substantially above the vessel, wherein the central portion is positioned to at least amidships and forward thereof, the support having a structural strength sufficient for withstanding forces from towing a human performer behind the vessel from a rope attached to the support;

an elevated tow rope attachment point attached to the central portion for attaching a tow rope thereto for towing the performer; and

a tow rope having a proximal end rigidly attached to the elevated tow rope attachment point, the tow rope further having a distal end configured for towing a performer during operation of the vessel.

7. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 6, wherein the support is rotatably attached to starboard and port gunwales of the vessel so that at least a portion of the support is rotatable into a horizontal storage position.

8. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 6, wherein the support comprises a skeletal frame.

9. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 8, wherein the skeletal frame comprises first and second generally vertical supports attached respectively to port and starboard gunwales, and wherein the first and second supports have sufficient length so that vertical extremities thereof extend substantially above the vessel.

10. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 9, further comprising a third support attached to the vessel forward of the first and second supports, with the third support extending upwardly and aft, and wherein the third support is spaced from the first and second supports a sufficient distance to impart stability to the skeletal towing structure, and wherein upper portions of the first, second and third supports are coupled with a generally horizontal bridging portion located generally above and proximate the operator's station.

11. (currently amended): A towing apparatus for improving aerial characteristics of a performance by a performer using a water sport implement, the towing apparatus comprising:

a vessel behind which the performer is to be towed, the vessel including a bow, a stern and an operator station of the towing vessel positioned at least amidships and

forward thereof between opposing sides;

a relatively rigid vertical support structure fitted between the sides of the vessel, the support structure having a generally horizontal portion at a height substantially above the level of the operator station, wherein the generally horizontal portion is positioned to at least amidships and forward thereof, the support structure having a structural strength sufficient to withstand forces from towing a human performer behind the vessel by a rope attached to the support; and

a tow rope having a proximal end rigidly attached to the horizontal portion of the support structure, the tow rope further having a distal end configured for towing the performer ~~therefrom~~ while the vessel is operating in a body of water.

12. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 11, further comprising attaching means for attaching the support structure to opposing sides of the vessel, the attaching means operable so as to permit the support structure to be rotated downwardly so that the vessel may pass underneath a bridge or into a boat house.

13. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 11, wherein the support structure comprises a skeletal frame having a forward vertical support element and an aft vertical support element, and wherein the apparatus further comprises a plurality of longitudinally extending bars fixedly attached between each of the forward and aft vertical support elements thus forming a skeletal frame.

14. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 11, wherein the support is rearwardly angled for having its lower extremity forward of its upper extremity.

15. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 11, wherein the support is forwardly angled for having its lower extremity aft of its upper extremity.

16. (previously presented): The apparatus recited in claim 11, further comprising a tow rope connecting element attached to the bridging portion for attaching the tow rope thereto.

17. (previously presented): An apparatus comprising:  
a towing vessel having a bow, a stern, opposing starboard and port gunwales and an operator station of the towing vessel located between the gunwales and positioned at least one of amidships and forward amidships;  
a skeletal frame having opposing first and second generally vertical supports attached respectively to port and starboard gunwales of the vessel, the skeletal frame having a bridging portion between the opposing first and second generally vertical supports, the first and second vertical supports having sufficient length so that vertical extremities attached to the bridging portion generally place the bridging portion above and proximate the operators station for supporting a tow rope attachment point substantially above the vessel, wherein the bridging portion is positioned to at least amidships and forward thereof, the skeletal frame further having a third support attached to the vessel forward of the first and second supports, with the third support extending upwardly and aft, and wherein the third support is spaced from the first and second supports a sufficient distance to impart stability to the skeletal towing structure, and wherein an upper portion of the third support is coupled with the bridging portion, the skeletal frame having a structural strength sufficient for withstanding forces from towing a human performer behind the vessel from a rope attached to the support; and  
an elevated tow rope attachment point attached to the central portion for

attaching a tow rope thereto for towing the performer.

18. (currently amended): A towing apparatus for improving aerial characteristics of a performance by a performer using a water sport implement, the towing apparatus comprising:

a vessel behind which the performer is to be towed, the vessel including a bow, a stern and an operator station of the towing vessel positioned at least amidships and forward thereof between opposing sides;

a rigid vertical support structure fitted between the sides of the vessel, the support structure having a generally horizontal portion at a height substantially above the level of the operator station, wherein the generally horizontal portion is positioned to at least amidships and forward thereof, wherein the support is rearwardly angled for having its lower extremity forward of its upper extremity, the support structure having a structural strength sufficient to withstand forces from towing a human performer behind the vessel by a rope attached to the support; and

a tow rope having a proximal end rigidly attached to the horizontal portion of the support structure, the tow rope further having a distal end configured for towing a performer ~~therefrom~~ while the vessel is operating in a body of water.

19. (currently amended): A towing apparatus for improving aerial characteristics of a performance by a performer using a water sport implement, the towing apparatus comprising:

a vessel behind which the performer is to be towed, the vessel including a bow, a stern and an operator station of the towing vessel positioned at least amidships and forward thereof between opposing sides;

a rigid vertical support structure fitted between the sides of the vessel, the

support structure having a generally horizontal portion at a height substantially above the level of the operator station, wherein the generally horizontal portion is positioned to at least amidships and forward thereof, wherein the support is forwardly angled for having its lower extremity aft of its upper extremity, the support structure having a structural strength sufficient to withstand forces from towing a human performer behind the vessel by a rope attached to the support; and

a tow rope having a proximal end rigidly attached to the horizontal portion of the support structure, the tow rope further having a distal end configured for towing a performer ~~therefrom~~ while the vessel is operating in a body of water.